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MILITARY SERVICE AND THE FUTURE OF JAPANESE AMERICANS

Opening the U. S. Army again to young men of Japanese ancestry is the most significant event in the life of the American people of Japanese ancestry since the evacuation. The place which these people will have in American life for many years to come will depend upon the response which eligible young men now make to this opportunity to volunteer for service in the armed forces of the nation.

Evacuation and the propaganda which has accompanied it have made the great bulk of American people doubtful of the loyalty of this group of American citizens and their parents. This has been true even though there have been all across the country a great many people who have understood the situation and have insisted that these people were entirely loyal.

While this propaganda has caused masses of people to form foolish opinions, the nisei soldiers in the army have been performing a splendid task. They have not only done good soldiering but they have demonstrated to all open-minded people who know them that they are worthy of a place in the armed forces of our country as well as any normal place in American life. It is true that the Japanese people in America and their friends have been wounded by the discrimination which has been meted out to them. This discrimination has been resented by hosts of American people of other racial ancestry. If young men now refuse to enlist in the United States Army, then the critics will be able to say, "I told you so; these people are not loyal to America!" Whereas, if young men and women now do volunteer, even though hurt by former mistrust, the American people will be compelled to acknowledge that these young people are not different from other Americans of their age.

Such a response as this will do other things. It will give those young people an unquestioned right to a place in American life when this terrible war is over. It will also convince American people, including those who are in charge of great industries, that they should open their doors of employment to the fathers and friends, sisters and sweethearts of those young people. This is very important. If the members of the families of nisei soldiers can find employment in community life, they can change the minds and attitudes of large sections of the American public.

Some of these young nisei are discouraged because their fathers are in internment camps. This is one of the unfortunate tragedies of the war. However, prompt enlistment in the army and engagement in the effort to bring this war to a close will make the Department of Justice more anxious to give these interned fathers a chance to rejoin their families.

Young people in these centers should not be repelled by the suggestion that this first group is to be organized into a separate army unit. It ought to be reassuring to remember that Mr. Myer and his entire W.R.A. staff have at heart the future welfare of these young Americans of Japanese ancestry. The W.R.A. has worked for seven months to get this avenue of government service open again. They have agreed to this special unit. One of the reasons for this plan is the publicity value which it contains. In fact it will get large publicity. There will be unusual educational value in this unit. It will give every friend these evacuees have in the United States a chance to convince other Americans that these young people are worthy and loyal and capable. There will be other nisei boys and girls called into the service of the country. They will not be added to this separate unit but will find a natural and normal place in the military establishments of our country.

It is certainly true that this is a most significant event in the history of the 130,000 American people of Japanese ancestry. It gives them a chance to establish themselves in the life of the country and to secure the good will of the entire nation.

--Joseph B. Hunter.